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"FRICCHI"

FARCE IN ONE ACT

BY DARIO NICCODEMI

CHARACTERS

La Marchesa Minnie

Renzo D'Asola

La Contessa Rina

Nannina

The Lady of the Third Floor

A very elegant feminine little drawing-room in the purest Pompadour style. On the walls, hung with ivory-colored silk, are four small tapestries, with appropriate pastoral subjects by Lancret. The furniture is light and choice, with chairs and seats which seem intended for anything rather than sitting upon. A cabinet full of fans, miniatures, snuff-boxes, and a hundred rare and beautiful knick-knacks. Nattier blue carpet. Tables decorated with slender Saxe vases, with few, but very fresh flowers. Tall lamps, shaded with lace, shed through the room a diffused light, soft and golden.

SCENE I

LA MARCHESA MINNIE.—NANNINA

La Marchesa reclining in a *chaise-longue* is dressed in a very light tea-gown, that accords perfectly with the style, color, and "precious" spirit of the room. And the Marchesa by her languid, slightly artificial pose; by her white neck shining through impalpable gauze; by her hair drawn over her forehead, which makes still smaller her little head; by the strip of black velvet encircling her round, slender throat; by a patch of the blackest which emphasizes the white pearls of her still smile; by the book bound in dark red and ornamented with gold arabesques which emphasizes the rosy whiteness of her perfect fingers; by the light; by the graceful lines; the studied pose; by the elegance of every detail, seems herself Nattier's most beautiful pastel. Marchesa Minnie neither reads nor moves. She is the living masterpiece of that perfect setting. And she thinks of that masterpiece with a mysterious smile, and for the moment, one black patch disappears in a dimple which the smile creates in her beautiful velvet cheek. After a moment of silence Nannina enters. A perfectly appointed soubrette. Seemingly she has stepped from one of the Lancret tapestries to become a part of the setting of a delicious comedy by Marivaux.

She is dressed in black. Stockinged like Cenerentola at the festival. A little white muslin cap rests upon the dark curls that shade her forehead. The tiny round embroidered silk apron, seems like the petal of a great white flower.

Light and agile she advances toward the Marchesa.

NANNINA.—Signora Marchesa.

MINNIE.—Is there some one there, my dear?

NANNINA.—No—No one, Signora Marchesa.

MINNIE.—What is it then?

NANNINA.—I wanted to speak to you all the same—because it is ten o'clock.

MINNIE.—But why are you so impatient.

NANNINA.—Because I am sure that the Signora Marchesa is impatient, and I am come to tell her—

MINNIE.—That no one has arrived.

NANNINA.—Precisely.

MINNIE.—Thank you.

(Bell rings.)

NANNINA.—Ah!

MINNIE.—What is the matter?

NANNINA.—My heart beats so, Signora Marchesa.

MINNIE.—Quiet it and open the door.

NANNINA.—And if it should be . . . ?

MINNIE.—Not yet. It must be the Countess Rina. Let her come in.

NANNINA.—I am going, Signora Marchesa
—but my heart beats so——

(Exit.)

SCENE II

MARCHESA MINNIE AND THE CONTESSA
RINA

MINNIE.—You are late, Rina.

RINA.—Forgive me, dear, we had people
to dinner and I couldn't get away any
sooner,—but wait! Let me admire you.
... Wonderful! Don't move! It would
be a sin! You are a work of art.

MINNIE.—I won't move.

RINA.—What has happened? Why all
this elegance? Why did you write to
me?

MINNIE.—I will tell you. But first tell me
how many men you know.

RINA.—What?

MINNIE.—How many men do you know?

RINA.—That is a question no one has ever
asked me before.

MINNIE.—Count them. Be quick.

RINA.—But what nonsense!

MINNIE.—Well then don't tell me. I will
make believe that the question has been
asked me and I will answer it. I know
one hundred and thirty-seven men,
without counting foreigners. One hun-
dred and thirty-seven men! Do you
understand?

RINA.—Very well. And then——?

MINNIE.—And then? ... Nothing. I know
all these men by heart. They have all
said the same things to me, with the
same words, in the same voice; the same
lies, the same gestures, the same ad-
jurations. They have all sent me the
same flowers with the same cards bear-
ing the same compliments.

RINA.—But, what ...

MINNIE.—Wait. Be silent and listen or
you shall not know anything.

RINA.—I am silent—I listen—but I don't
understand.

MINNIE.—You will understand very soon.
Now I have always seen these hundred
and thirty-seven men about. Youths,
married men, widowers,—I have always
seen them. They are the actors on the
social film of my life—they pass and re-
pass, they appear and disappear, go
and come continually—without end or
variety, and I know what they will do,
what they think, how they live. I know
their clothes as well as their adventures;
their business affairs as well as their
neckties.

RINA.—And then——?

MINNIE.—This is the point. The men I
know bore me to death. I should like to
see whether those I do not know might
not divert me.

RINA.—And how are you going to find
out?

MINNIE.—The idea came to me through
a letter that I have received from Lon-
don from Lady Guinham. She writes
me: "Dear friend. Find me an Italian
teacher for my son. He must be young
and good-looking; cultivated and seri-
ous; well-mannered and intellectual;
healthy in mind and body; severe with
himself and indulgent to others; artistic
and practical; good and strong ..."

RINA.—And what did you reply?

MINNIE.—That I would look, but that if
I found him I would marry him. And
so the idea came to me to search for
this marvel who would have for me all
the charm of novelty, a little mystery—
a little of the unknown. Who would be
in fact different from my one hundred
and thirty-seven eternally unchanging
friends.

RINA.—And what have you done?

MINNIE.—I have put an advertisement
in the paper.

RINA.—Minnie! You are crazy, absolutely mad!

MINNIE.—Why? Diogenes looked for the man, but his lantern was so grimy and smokey that he couldn't find him. I, more modern, make use of a magic lantern the rays of which penetrate everywhere—pubilcity. Look. (*Opens a volume de luxe and takes out a newspaper-clipping. Reads.*) "Widow, thirty, very beautiful..." Do I exaggerate?

RINA.—Not at all. The words all cost the same.

MINNIE.—(*Reads.*) "Cultivated, elegant, good, titled; fifty-thousand income; house in the city, castle in the country; wishes to make the acquaintance of a distinguished man of from thirty-five to forty years; good-looking; healthy; tall, not less than six feet; with title and income not inferior to her own:—no objection to a widower without children; must be musical, a lover of antiques, particularly of the eighteenth century French; who has seen much and travelled much; who neither dyes nor curls his hair; who has memories, not too tenacious, and hopes, but not too extravagant. Address Marchesa Minnie, general Post Office."

RINA.—You do not mean it, Minnie: I cannot tell you how astonished, upset—and stupefied... But, no. It is a joke! I do not believe it. It is not possible that you...

MINNIE.—It is very possible because I have found him.

RINA.—You have found him!

MINNIE.—I think so. After several dozen stupid letters, with which I won't bore you,... Look... *From a box she takes a great pile of letters of all sizes, shapes, and colors.* Take one, for example... this... listen... (*Reads.*) "If the Signora Marchesa instead of titles, riches, elegance, height and youth;—all vain things,

empty and ephemeral,—would be willing to content herself with a man full of enthusiasm..."

RINA.—Very good!—

MINNIE.—Then: After a hundred letters funny, or pious, or irrelevant, I received, the day before yesterday, this note. (*From the same book takes a letter and reads.*) "Marchesa, I am the man you seek. You are the woman I am seeking. In the evening of the day after tomorrow, at twenty-three o'clock I shall have the honor of placing at your feet the enthusiastic homage of my respect if you will write to Count Renzo d'Asola, Jockey Club, City."

RINA.—He writes a beautiful hand! And you?

MINNIE.—I have written to him.

RINA.—But what if he should really come?

MINNIE.—I should really receive him.

RINA.—And if he should...

(*Nannina. enters quickly, visibly agitated.*)

SCENE III

MINNIE, RINA, NANNINA

NANNINA.—Signora Marchesa...

MINNIE.—He!?

NANNINA.—Yes... He!... Heavens. What a man!

MINNIE.—What is he like?

NANNINA.—(*Enthusiastically.*) Magnificent!

MINNIE.—Indeed?

NANNINA.—Yes, Signora Marchesa... Tall, elegant, impressive. He has silvered temples and a golden voice; a smile of pearls, and distracting eyes.

MINNIE.—Nannina, you exaggerate.

NANNINA.—No, Signora Marchesa; I do not exaggerate. It is so. You can see in a moment that he is of the first quality.

MINNIE.—Well then... Courage...!

RINA.—Wait... Think of what you are doing. He is a stranger.

MINNIE.—That is why I want to know him. (*To Nannina*). Ask him to come in.

NANNINA.—I go, Signora Marchesa; but my heart . . .

MINNIE.—Beats so. I know it—quiet it again and ask the gentleman to come in.

(*Exit Nannina*).

RINA.—It's your final decision?

MINNIE.—I will see him. Go into my room. I want to feel that you are near. If anything happens I will call you.

RINA.—But if he should be a dreadful person?

MINNIE.—Heavens! How that would divert me! Here he comes. Fly!

(*Exit Rina, and the Marchesa resumes her pose of a smiling masterpiece; the pose that the Pauline Borgbesi by Canova has made famous*).

SCENE IV

MINNIE—RENZO

Physically Count Renzo corresponds very well to the demands of the Marchesa and to the enthusiasm of Nannina. He is tall; of unquestionable elegance but simple and serious. Silvery on the temples, much sweetness in his gray eyes, which seem aware of all the experiences of life, and are therefore, very grave. He enters and stands just within the door as if rooted to the spot, astounded at the marvel before him.

The Marchesa is seemingly calm, but breathes more quickly than usual.

They look at each other like two enemies before an attack, and there ensues one of those prolonged silences that always make the public laugh, even when the unhappiness of the actors is expressed.

RENZO.—Marchesa . . .

MINNIE.—Be seated, Count . . . (*Extending her arm to indicate the nearest arm-chair. Renzo takes her hand, which trembles a little, and kisses it bowing profoundly*). (*And then silence*).

RENZO.—Marchesa . . .

MINNIE.—Be seated.

RENZO.—Thank you. (*He sits. Puts his gloves and shining high hat on a neighboring chair*).

MINNIE.—You are Count Renzo d'Asola, are you not?

RENZO.—I am indeed . . . (*Long pause*).

MINNIE.—And . . .

RENZO.—You spoke?

MINNIE.—No.

RENZO.—I thought you did.

MINNIE.—No. (*Another pause*).

RENZO.—From Brescia.

MINNIE.—What?

RENZO.—I completed my introduction: Count Renzo d'Asola, of Brescia.

MINNIE.—(*With exaggerated surprise*). Oh! . . . Indeed?

RENZO.—Yes, Marchesa.

MINNIE.—I am very, very glad . . .

RENZO.—I see that it is not difficult to please you, Marchesa.

MINNIE.—I know Brescia.

RENZO.—So do I. (*They laugh*).

MINNIE.—It is a beautiful city. I remember the truly magnificent courtyards of certain old palaces; certain stupendous railings with strong, heavy, graceful lines.

RENZO.—The city, like the people, Marchesa, have the characteristics of their qualities.

MINNIE.—You believe it?

RENZO.—I am sure of it.

MINNIE.—Then you ought to be very stern and I ought to begin to lose the impression of quiet, and dust, that I brought away after my two minutes in Brescia.

RENZO.—Why, Marchesa?

MINNIE.—Because of what I have done. May I ask you a question?

RENZO.—You may, Marchesa; any question.

MINNIE.—Tell me the real truth, however brutal. What did you think of my jest?

RENZO.—I thought it a jest; but, now . . .

MINNIE.—Now . . .

RENZO.—Now I think it one no longer. Now I think that instead of a jest it is a dream; because certainly this draw-

ing-room is the ante-chamber to Paradise, and because you, Marchesa, are more like a vision than a woman. (*He looks her over with that comprehensiveness natural to men in moments when they are thinking while they speak*). I do not know how to express, how to give form to my admiration; I do not know how to express myself at all, because my brain is so overwhelmed by this supreme elegance; and so abashed by this celestial vision . . .

MINNIE.—Gently, Count.

RENZO.—(*Collecting himself*). Have I said too much?

MINNIE.—No; but be reasonable.

RENZO.—I unwillingly obey.

MINNIE.—Will you take a cup of tea?

RENZO.—If it will give you any pleasure I will take six cups, although I do not care for this yellow beverage, so celebrated and insular.

MINNIE.—Tell me what you do take.

RENZO.—Tea, Marchesa, tea. I already feel the desire to sacrifice myself for you. I will take tea; but do not ring yet. Let me still admire; let me convince myself that this is true; that this is a real room; that you are a living lady, veritable and tangible.

MINNIE.—Will you listen to me for a moment, Count?

RENZO.—Even for a century, Marchesa.

MINNIE.—Do you know why I was so foolish as to put that announcement in the paper?—

RENZO.—Yes; so that I might come here.

MINNIE.—Be serious. Can you imagine?

RENZO.—No.

MINNIE.—I will tell you. Because I simply wanted to know a man who was different; I do not say superior or inferior, but different. So please do not begin to say the usual things to me, the eternal litany of banalities that I have heard ever since I was grown-up. Be different.

RENZO.—(*Rather surprised*). You see, Marchesa, I must know first what kind of men you have known, in order to be able to be different.

MINNIE.—They are all alike.

RENZO.—The information is a little vague. May I ask you a question also Marchesa? Do all these men that you know walk on their feet? No . . . I am not jesting . . . Answer: Do they walk on their feet . . .

MINNIE.—But why . . .

RENZO.—Because if they all walk on their feet, I will walk on my hands, you cannot deny, Marchesa, that this would be a radical difference.

MINNIE.—If we begin to jest it will be impossible for us to understand each other. I am a serious lady, I am a . . .

RENZO.—A silly one?

MINNIE.—(*Rising proudly*). Count!

RENZO.—Has no one ever said that to you?

MINNIE.—No, indeed.

RENZO.—Then:—Second difference. *Es ùd mas luminosa que una estrella y mas hechicera que la mismisima virgen!*

MINNIE.—What?

RENZO.—I have paid you the most banal compliment but in purest Spanish. Has that ever happened to you before?

MINNIE.—(*Laughing in spite of herself*). No. Never.

RENZO.—That is three. Now, Marchesa, I have established an incontestable moral difference.

MINNIE.—But be serious.

(*At this moment, a little dog of purest mongrel race, bursts in at the door, quick, agile, and playful. He stops to look at the Marchesa and the Count. Hesitates a moment, has the idea of advancing then of retreating; but hearing no command to retreat, he trots up to the Count. The Marchesa looks at the intruder with hostility. The Count, believing that the dog belongs to the house, receives him with exaggerated affability, remembering the wise Arab who said: To get the favor of*

a woman, flatter first the husband, then the mother, or the dog).

RENZO.—Good dog! Come here! Come!
(The dog leaps and jumps with joy). What life!
What voracity these little beasts have!
Is it not true, Marchesa?

MINNIE.—(Believing the dog to belong to the Count, tries to be cordial). He is such a darling!

(The dog begins an inspection of all the corners of the room, looks at everything, smells everything. The Marchesa watches him with apprehension; trembling for her laces, hangings, and ornaments).

RENZO.—How much company these little creatures are!

MINNIE.—Yes, are they not?

RENZO.—It ends by one not being able to get along without them.

MINNIE.—That is so.

RENZO.—Champfort said: The more I know men the more I love dogs.

MINNIE.—(Watching with increasing uneasiness the evolutions of the dog). What? . . . who said it? . . . I beg your pardon; I was not attending.

RENZO.—Champfort, but I will improve upon him and say instead: the more I know of dogs the more I love their owners.

(The dog has the Count's gloves between his teeth, and is shaking them furiously. He then runs around like mad, then he stops and begins to whine. The Count is struck dumb because the gloves are genuine Dents of finest quality).

Come here . . . Quick . . . Here . . . Will you permit me, Marchesa?

MINNIE.—Do whatever you can.

(The Count rises to seize the dog, but the animal flies around the room wildly, joyously. While he has the gloves between his teeth, the Marchesa breathes freely).

MINNIE.—It is amusing.

RENZO.—Most amusing.

MINNIE.—Shall we resume our conversation?

RENZO.—(Not able to recover his gloves, he reseats himself). Certainly, Marchesa, let us resume our conversation (Between his teeth) confound the dog!

MINNIE.—You were saying that the moral differences . . .

RENZO.—Precisely, I said that to establish the moral differences . . .

(But the tone of the conversation is changed. The spell is broken. The gallantry of the Count continues to be eager but more mechanical, less enthusiastic; and the affability of the Marchesa is inattentive and forced).

MINNIE.—You cannot imagine the strange, the incredible, psychological process that induced me to put those lines in the paper.

RENZO.—I do not know, I cannot imagine; but I do not seek the cause, the effect is enough—the fact that I am here, Marchesa, before you.

MINNIE.—(Abstracted). Where is he?

RENZO.—Who?

MINNIE.—The dog.

RENZO.—But! . . . He must have gone out.

MINNIE.—No. I have not seen him go out.

RENZO.—Then he has vanished.

MINNIE.—(Excitedly). Look for him, I beg of you, look for him.

RENZO.—Instantly, Marchesa. (The Count rises, picks up his poor chewed gloves; then looks about, calling and whistling).

MINNIE.—Is he there?

RENZO.—He has disappeared . . . Ah! . . . Rascal! . . . Ah! there he is, treating your curtains as he has treated my gloves.

MINNIE.—(Indignantly). It is insupportable!

RENZO.—He is amusing himself!

MINNIE.—Call him, call him . . .

RENZO.—Here . . . Ah! if I catch you, you scamp!

(The dog flees, jumps up onto the chair where lies the shining hat which falls to the floor; the dog

follows it, pushes it before him, gets into it, and rolls it around growling with satisfaction. The Marchesa is red with laughter; the Count is green with rage).

MINNIE.—Your dog is a demon.

RENZO.—Excuse me, Marchesa, I do not know why you call him mine . . . My . . . In fact . . .

MINNIE.—Your hat is a little ruffled.

RENZO.—Quite so—ruined absolutely!

MINNIE.—(*Still laughing*). One must have patience.

RENZO.—(*Smoothing his damaged hat with his sleeve*). I know it, one must have patience, but dogs ought to be restrained.

MINNIE.—(*With a desperate shriek*). Ohhh! . . . (*The dog has overturned a slender vase of flowers, and upon the Nattier blue carpet appears a dark stain which spreads rapidly*). This is too much!

RENZO.—One must have patience, Marchesa.

MINNIE.—(*Violently*). I have already had too much patience.

RENZO.—I also, Marchesa. I have had too much . . .

MINNIE.—My carpet is ruined!

RENZO.—Like my hat.

MINNIE.—Such things ought not to be allowed.

RENZO.—I did not allow it, Marchesa.

MINNIE.—Dogs are not made for drawing-rooms.

RENZO.—That is what I have always thought.

MINNIE.—And then—still, he is yours. Oh! look, look. Now he is going to tear that lace. Call him! Call him!

RENZO.—You call him, Marchesa. You ought to know his name.

MINNIE.—Ah! Please do not jest! I really do not know how you ever thought of bringing such a beast into a ladies' drawing-room. It is an unconvictionality without precedent, unheard of!

RENZO.—But, permit me to say . . .

MINNIE.—(*More excitedly still*). Not a word. Enough.

RENZO.—I also consider it enough . . .

MINNIE.—I am punished for my folly.

RENZO.—But . . .

MINNIE.—Good evening, Signore. Please relieve me of your presence.

RENZO.—Immediately, Marchesa. (*Turns toward the door*).

MINNIE.—And take him with you.

RENZO.—Who?

MINNIE.—Your dog.

RENZO.—Ah! No! . . . I never had a dog in my life (*pointing to his hat and gloves*) and these would be enough to prevent my ever having one.

A VOICE.—Fricchi! Fricchi!

MINNIE.—(*At the door*). Who is that, Nannina?

NANNINA.—The lady on the third floor has lost her dog, and is crazy, crying, and taking on; she is looking for it everywhere.

A VOICE.—(*Desperately*). Fricchi! Fricchi!

MINNIE.—Tell her that her dog is here, and I wish she would take it away as soon as possible.

THE LADY FROM THE THIRD FLOOR.—(*Enters almost in tears, seeing the dog she snatches him up—embracing and kissing him frantically*). My love! My love! My pet lamb! At last! Don't you know that your Mamma would die if she could not find you? There! There! Kiss me! Kiss me! There! There! (*And without either thanking the others or excusing herself, she goes out delighted and triumphant*).

MINNIE.—(*After a pause which ends in a laugh*). Ah! . . . This then! . . .

RENZO.—Yes, Marchesa; exactly so . . . This then! . . .

MINNIE.—He is a darling! darling! darling! (*Laughs again heartily*). and I thought . . .

RENZO.—Heavens! . . . And I too thought . . .

MINNIE.—It is too much!

RENZO.—Stupendous!

MINNIE.—And we both made the same mistake.

RENZO.—Exactly, Marchesa, exactly!

MINNIE.—How can I persuade you to forgive me?

RENZO.—By being convinced that I am really a “different” man . . .

MINNIE.—In what way?

RENZO.—If I had been like all the others I should have been silent perhaps about the gloves, but for the hat I would have taken the dog by the neck and thrown him out the window. Don’t deny it! Be just to me, Marchesa.

MINNIE.—(*Ring the bell*). Perhaps! . . . who knows! . . . Perhaps! . . .

RENZO.—I am sure of it.

(*Enter Nannina*).

MINNIE.—Bring the tea.

NANNINA.—Yes, Signora Marchesa.

MINNIE.—(*Aside to Nannina*). And the Countessa Rina?

NANNINA.—(*Aside to the Marchesa*). As soon as she had seen the Count through the keyhole, she knew that the Marchesa would not need any one, and went away.

MINNIE.—Bring the tea.

NANNINA.—Yes, Signora Marchesa.

MINNIE.—And now Count, let us talk a little of ourselves, very seriously.

RENZO.—You speak. I will listen, and if the sound disturbs me I will wake up.

MINNIE.—But you are . . .

RENZO.—I have decided not to say or to do that which any one else has ever said or done.

MINNIE.—But you are terrible.

RENZO.—No. I am different.

La Lettura.

